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The Bomb, The Baby and The Pope

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"Without God," T. S. Eliot writes in "The Rock," all our physics, all our science are nothing but

"Endless inventions, endless experiments
Bringing knowledge of motion but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech but not of silence;
Knowledge of words and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death
But nearness to death no nearer to God.

TRULY we live in an age which is at once the most enlightened and the most confused. It is an age which acknowledges that the immediate goal of science is the perpetuation of human life and the creation of a material environment in which life can be enjoyed more abundantly. Yet, it is a fact that the outstanding achievement of this century has been the creation by nuclear fission of the greatest means of mass destruction of human life ever conceived by man. We have made the atom bomb and now the hydrogen bomb. We have the "know-how." With increasing frequency men are asking "Do we have the 'know-why'?" Since we have made these monstrous things, we now ask ourselves, "Should we make more?" The answer lies in the sacredness of human life. The eminent biologist LeCompte DuNouy ("Human Destiny") states "Too many look upon our inventions as symbols of true civilization. Not human comfort and convenience but human dignity must be our ideal. Intelligence unless governed by conscience will generally influence man adversely in the choice between good and evil. That is why intelligence alone is dangerous. Alone, it made the atom bomb. Suddenly people realized that a triumph of science brutally challenged their security, the conflict between pure intelligence and moral values has become a matter of life and death." The right to life and the moral value of the human life have suddenly become intensely significant not only to the scientist but to the philosopher as well.

It is the dubious distinction of the second half of this century that we now await the perfection of an oral contraceptive to offer to mankind a cheap universal means of preventing or destroying the greatest single gift of God—human life itself. For let there be no mistake, it is human life

which is the target whether the means be the fission of the atom or the prevention of the fusion of the gametes. We might well join Eliot in his cry:—

"Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the dust."

It is a paradoxically perplexing age. While Catholic philosophy never has been more highly esteemed, Catholic theological dogma has never been more vigorously misunderstood and denounced. F. S. C. Northrop, Professor of Philosophy at Yale ("The Meeting of East and West" . . . page 254.) has commented upon this recent revival of interest in Roman Catholic philosophy on the part of some of the acute of modern non-Catholic philosophers and thinkers. "In the United States, there has been a quite independent return to the Thomistic and Aristotelian philosophy as a measure of legal theory and educational policy under the leadership of President Stringfellow Barr and Dean Scott Buchanan of St. John's College; and of Professor Mortimer Adler and former President Robert M. Hutchins at the University of Chicago. This indigenous American development is the more impressive because all of its leaders are exceptionally informed, influential and original thinkers; and also because none of them was initially a Roman Catholic."

Although Gilson and Maritain universally recognized outstanding philosophers both hold that human reason must be quickened and guided by Christian faith, Paul Blanshard sneers at the priests for daring to express dogmatic moral opinions on what are obviously moral problems. He states: ("American Democracy and Catholic Power" . . . p. 108) "Catholic priests tell Catholic physicians when the life of a soul begins in the womb, what the surgeon *can* and *cannot* (sic) do concerning the ending of the life of the fetus, and what must be done to the new-born child immediately after birth. In the field of sexual conduct the priests not only lay down very definite and detailed instructions concerning courtship, marriage and divorce; but also proclaim rules concerning contraception, abortion, masturbation, artificial insemination, sterilization, sodomy and the manners of the marriage bed. They believe that celibacy does not disqualify them from giving advice on such matters." What anyone *should* or *should not* do in any activity of life has always been the acknowledged sphere of moralistic thinking. One need not be an experienced murderer to know that murder is intrinsically wrong.

G. K. Chesterton pointed out there are only two kinds of people; those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and do not

know it. Many who do not believe in revealed truth accept as ultimate truth what is supposed to be the last teaching of science. But science is constantly changing. Hence, for these men science will be constantly changing and constantly dogmatic.

One of the greatest instances of misunderstanding of Catholic dogma was that of Norman Thomas (The Nation - May 14, 1949, p. 551) reviewing Blanshard's book "that if a choice be made the life of the unborn child, even the smallest embryo, should be preferred to that of the mother." If the fetus is not a human being, then of course the Catholic position rests on an erroneous premise. It would seem, however, that the burden of proving that the fetus is not a human being rests upon those who deny it, and that they should assume this burden before proceeding to disembowel the fetus or to crush its skull.

Pope Pius XII has given this formal answer to this misunderstood problem (An address to the Catholic Physicians in Rome, 1951.) "Innocent human life, in whatever condition it is found, is withdrawn, from the very first moment of its existence, from any direct deliberate attack. This is a fundamental right of human person, which is of general value in the Christian conception of life; hence as valid for the life still hidden within the womb of the mother, as for the life already born and developing outside of her; as much opposed to direct abortion as to the direct killing of the child before, during or after its birth. This principle holds good both for the life of the child as well as for that of the mother. *Never and in no case has the Church taught that the life of the child must be preferred to that of the mother.* It is erroneous to put the question with this alternative; either the life of the child or that of the mother. No, neither the life of the mother, nor the life of the child can be subjected to an act of direct suppression. In the one case, as in the other, there can be but one obligation; to make every effort to save the lives of both, of the mother and of the child. On purpose, we have always used the expression 'direct attempt on the life of an innocent person,' 'direct killing.' Because if, for example, the saving of the life of the future mother independently of her pregnancy should urgently require a surgical act or other therapeutic treatment which would have as a necessary consequence in no way desired nor intended but inevitable the death of the fetus, such an act could no longer be called a direct attempt on an innocent life. Under these conditions, the operation can be licit like other similar medical interventions granted always that a good of high worth is concerned, such as life and that it is not possible to postpone the operation until after the birth of the child nor to have recourse to other efficacious remedies. On the other hand, the church knows how to consider with sympathy and understanding the real difficulties of the

married state in our day. Therefore, in our last allocution on conjugal morality we affirmed the legitimacy and at the same time the limits, in truth very wide, of a regulation of offspring which unlike so-called 'birth control' is compatible with the law of God. One may even hope (but in this matter the church naturally leaves the judgment to medical science) that science will succeed in providing this licit method with a sufficiently secure basis, and the most recent information seems to confirm such a hope."

Paul Blanshard should not be surprised with the simple logic that in matters concerning the destruction or prevention of human life scientists and physicians who share the Christian faith turn to such a noble source of inspiration for guidance. The greatest contribution of the modern marriage counselors is the great plan against parenthood. We may be proud to turn to such an astute defender of the privilege of parenthood.

During a recent lecture tour of seven medical centers in Europe, I observed a sterilization operation by an eminent British gynecologist. He was fair enough to say, "I know that you would not do this operation; I am not sure that I am completely right, but I'm going ahead anyhow." All too frequently this honest groping for direction is manifest among men of good will in science in every land.

On another occasion an eminent American specialist in the field of human reproduction inquired seriously, "Why does the Pope condemn me when I perform artificial donor insemination and help a wife whose husband is hopelessly sterile to have her own baby? The husband can then semi-adopt it since it is truly his wife's baby." The question was asked in good faith. I answered, "How would you like to be that test tube baby? How would you feel if one day you were told you were mother's bright idea, and that your father had reluctantly acquiesced?" My friend agreed that he had not given sufficient thought to that aspect of the problem and he also agreed that there certainly was an inalienable right for each one of us to know whence we came. Yet one of the cardinal principles of artificial insemination is that secrecy as to the donor of this semen must be maintained. In effect, this means that the scientifically conceived test tube bastard is of undetermined and indeterminable paternity. Nor can legal semi-adoption ever change the fact that he will forever be a stranger in his father's house. The Catholic physician need offer no apology for his refusal to initiate by any deliberate act the tragedy of a human being whose soul begins its earthy passage handicapped at the outset by such an enormous source of melancholia.

Dr. Myer Friedman warns: "One of the main causes of present insecurity is the loss of a sense of one's own past. Today, so many human beings are concerned about the future that they never take stock of the fact that

they exist in the present. Thus, they never tag today, and consequently when it becomes yesterday it escapes beyond the pale of conscious recall. An individual who lacks a past, who never thinks of his past, but is always tip-toeing on the present to peer with anxiety of the future, becomes insecure because he no longer exists in the dimensions of past, present and future."

Insecurity itself arises in many ways and it seems to me that one of the most important sources in the present day person is loss of the feeling of a personal Deity. He began to get lost after the thirteenth century when science attacked the concepts of the faith, eternity and infinity and substituted for them cynicism, time and place and interaction of time and place. I believe that man became lonely just as soon as he suspected that he was part of a random process without hope of intervention on his behalf by some Deity. It is probable that man becomes insecure when he cannot adore, or cannot lose himself in something greater than himself. It is very difficult for a man to lose himself in the random processes described by modern-day science.

The obsessive material instinct of the childless wife in no way justifies a random sireless son. Such a bizarre human being finding himself a meaningless wanderer on the wasteland of time—never able to know his true father nor to find his pride of lineage—might decide to terminate his artificially initiated life by suicide. Who can say that the physician who performed the act of donor insemination was free from moral guilt in planting this psychological time-bomb?

Sadly the Talmud says, "The barren are like the dead." There is within each one of us an intense desire to belong to the continuing stream of human life. From this great yearning of the human heart have sprung filial devotion, racial pride and patriotism itself. The pagan Chinese raised reverence for their ancestors to the status of a religion. The ancient Jews adored the father Jehovah. The central mystery of the Christian religion revolves around the Madonna and her eternal Child.

The Holy Father, defining the thought of the church on artificial donor insemination (Pius XII: International Congress of Catholic Physicians—October 1, 1949) spoke with the wisdom of the ages when he reaffirmed the Christian belief that "to spouses alone is reserved the right of human procreation."

*New things may be the scientist's role
But only God can make a soul.*

An address to the Catholic Club of Harvard University — Nov. 4, 1952